

THE INTERVIEW

The interview is the most important step toward the goal of employment. It is at the interview that the job is won or lost. The best test of any job search is the number of interviews you are offered. If you are consistently being interviewed, you should expect job offers. If you are not getting interviews, you need to reevaluate your job search strategy.

An employment interview is simply a meeting between you and a potential employer to discuss your qualifications and see if there is a “fit.” The employer wants to verify what they know about you and talk about your qualifications. If you have been called for an interview, you can assume that the employer is interested in you. The employer has a need that you may be able to meet. It is your goal to identify that need and convince the employer that you are the one for the job.

Interviews can be stressful, but when you are well prepared there is no reason to panic. An interview generally lasts from 30 to 60 minutes and most questions fall into standard categories.

Before the Interview

Preparation is the key to success in a calculated job search campaign. Preparation will help win the interview and will improve interview success. Begin by gathering all the information and documents you may need for the interview. Bring extra copies of your resume, a typed list of references and letter(s) of recommendation. You may also want to bring school transcripts, licenses and certifications. If you have them, work samples are also powerful tools (e.g., designs, drawings, writings). Finally, bring a pen and pad of paper for taking notes.



The more you know about the job, the employer, and the industry, the better prepared you will be to target your qualifications. Up to this point you should have been gathering some of this information. Now is the time to intensify your research and expand your knowledge. There are many sources of information. Ask the employer for a position description. Research employer profiles at any Chamber of Commerce or local library. Network with anyone you know who works for the company or for a related company.

The next step is to match your qualifications to the requirements of the job. A good approach is to write out your qualifications along with the job requirements. Think about some standard interview questions and how you might respond. Most questions are designed to find out more about you, your qualifications, or to test your reactions in a given situation. If you lack experience or skills in a required area, think about how you might make up for those deficiencies.

Practice being interviewed. Have someone act out the part of the employer. Watch yourself in a mirror and get that person's feedback afterward about how you did. Or, if possible, videotape yourself and watch it to see things you may want to improve.

Plan what you will wear, based on what the job is. Be sure to be clean and well-groomed. Come to the interview dressed appropriately. Common sense and good taste are the best guides in selecting clothing for the interview. Remember to:

- Avoid faddish styles and loud colors.
- Keep jewelry conservative.
- Press your clothing shine your shoes.
- Make sure that your clothes fit comfortably.
- Avoid heavy make-up.
- Dress one step above what you would wear on the job.

You want the employer to focus on your skills, not your appearance!

In the Interview

The purpose of an interview is to become acquainted and to learn about one another. The employer

wants to learn how you fit into the organization, but it is also an opportunity for you to evaluate the company. Employers use a variety of interview formats. There are series of interviews, panel interviews, phone interviews, or the traditional one-on-one interviews. Sometimes staff from the personnel or human resource departments will conduct an initial screening and the hiring authority will conduct the actual interview. Whatever the form or process, the interview is a basic effort to learn your qualifications.

During an interview it is important that you be yourself. It is advised that you get a good night's sleep and plan your travel to arrive in plenty of time. However, you should present yourself for the interview no more than 15 minutes early.



Be conscious of your body language. Body language consists of gestures and movements that give others clue about what who we really are. A person may say one thing but completely contradict him or herself with their use of body language.

A person's posture also conveys many different things; self-confidence or uncertainty. Always keep your back straight to convey competence, pride and confidence. Don't come across as vulnerable by slumping the shoulders. Your voice is also important. Speak firmly without hesitation. Move easily, but not cautiously.

Tapping a pen or pencil, wrapping hair around a finger, playing with a bracelet, ring or earring can send the message of nervousness, uncertainty, or uneasiness. Stroking the arm of a chair, fingering a glass or a pen, or other items, even an arm or leg, indicates loneliness or a need for a comfort.

You can easily use a pen or pencil to release nervous energy—used with a pad of paper it signals that you are making notes and are keeping up-to-date on things.

Body language that indicates nervousness:

- Chewing a pencil or other object
- Clenching or wringing the hands
- Tapping a pen or pencil
- Wrapping hair around a finger
- Fiddling with jewelry or hair

Putting a hand or fingers over your mouth could mean embarrassment or reluctance to talk; or could be construed as your unwillingness to tell the whole story. Crossing your arms over your chest sends the message: "I don't agree with you." Watch for tightness and tension in the rest of the body.

Direct eye contact in the business world conveys acceptance and honesty, but shouldn't be prolonged. Prolonged eye contact can become uncomfortable. Break eye contact frequently as you talk or listen by looking down to the side, and then back.

Nodding your head during conversations or interviews is actually quite important and indicates agreement or understanding.

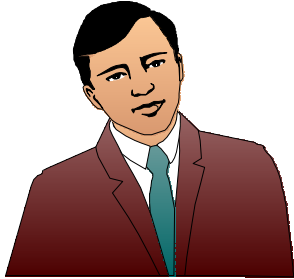
Do not put your hands in your pockets while speaking to an employer or during an interview. Worse yet, do not jingle your keys or spare change as you talk. Sitting with your hands clasped in front of you won't do either; it comes across as an appeal. What should you do with your hands then? Rest your hands in your lap when you are not making natural gestures with them—or take notes.

Interview Questions

The interview is a sales meeting and you are both the salesperson and the product. The basic question in every interview, whether it is asked or not, is "Why should I hire you?" All other questions center on

this one issue. Interview questions can take a variety of forms. Generally, questions will ask about you, your qualifications, experience, skills and motivation. If you have prepared for the interview and are confident about your qualifications, none of these questions should be difficult.

Listen carefully to each question asked in the interview. Take your time in responding and make sure your answers are positive. Express a good attitude and show that you are willing to work, eager to learn, and are flexible. If you are unsure of a question, do not be afraid to ask for clarification. Sometimes a good strategy is to close a response with a question for the interviewer.



Focus on your qualifications but also look for opportunities to personalize the interview. There is nothing wrong with injecting some personal insight into your life. However, do not get too personal or dwell too long on non-job related topics.

Show your potential to the company. Support your answers with examples from your experience. Avoid simple yes or no responses to questions.

Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something. Express your willingness to learn; but avoid making statements such as "I can do anything" or "I'll take anything." Instead, be specific about what you can do for the employer.

When discussing salary or benefits, let the employer lead the conversation. Avoid naming a specific salary; if you're too high, you risk not getting the job. If you're too low, you'll undersell yourself. Answer questions on salary requirements with responses such as, "I'm interested in the job as a career opportunity, so I'm negotiable on the starting salary". Negotiate, but don't sell yourself short.

Be aware of potentially discriminatory questions that may violate equal employment opportunity standards and have no relevance on your job performance. Questions about race, age, marital status, religion, children (or pregnancy), physical disabilities (unless it relates directly to the job duties), personal finances, or other similar questions are all inappropriate.

Respond to these questions with an answer such as: "My goal for this interview is to display my professional talents that will benefit your company." Then proceed to highlight or reiterate your skills.

Toward the end of the interview, you will probably be asked if you have any questions. Come prepared to ask a couple of specific questions that show your knowledge and interest in the job. This is not the time to ask about pay or benefits.

Common Interview Questions

Here are a few questions you may be asked in an interview along with potential answers or ideas. Prepare a response in your own words for each question and then rehearse them aloud. This will ensure that you are as prepared as possible for the interview.

1. In what type of position are you most interested?
"I am good at accounting and math, and organizing information, etc. and a position related to these skills such as accounts payable." Avoid over-eager discussions of what you are hopefully planning for the future unless you are asked.
2. Have you ever had your driver's license revoked?
This question is sometimes asked even if the job does not require one. The employer may be trying to find out if you have been arrested for drunk driving, if you have a bad driving record, or the possibility of medical problems. Be prepared to answer this the best you can, keeping in mind that honesty is the best policy.

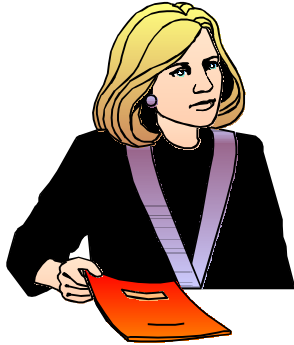
3. What would you do if....?
Stay calm; its okay to take a minute to think. Give yourself a cushion with an answer like, "One of the things I might consider would be...." and then give your answer.
4. What jobs have you held? How did you obtain them? Why did you leave your last job? (see the section "What to Say if You Were Fired or Changed Jobs Often")
Remember, its okay to leave a job. People leave jobs for many good reasons. "I reached a point where there was little potential for growth." "I left to raise a family and now I am ready to return to work permanently." "I decided to change careers, and I just earned my degree in....."
5. What are your ideas on salary?
"I am negotiable on salary" is always a safe answer. If the salary isn't already openly quoted, a good approach may be "Can you discuss your salary range with me?" Never introduce a salary discussion early in the interview, and it should only be brought up if it appears that you will be a legitimate contender for the job.
6. Why do you think you would like to work for our company?
If you've done your homework and know something about the company, you can answer with confidence: "I know that Ace Corporation specializes in refurbishing TV antennas for several companies. I did a project (or a paper, etc.) on this and became very interested in it."
7. How long do you expect to work here?
"As long as it is good for both of us." This is realistic and also honest.
8. Are you willing to relocate?
Don't panic! An answer that conveys possible interest should terms be mutually satisfying for both of you is best. "My family and I have talked about that possibility and find it interesting," is better than sitting dumbstruck in your chair. Re-emphasize the things that attract you to the company.
9. Are you looking for a permanent or temporary job?
Again, be honest. "I would prefer full time, permanent work with the company. But if I can be placed immediately only in part time work, this is good until I could be hired on a full-time basis." Employers are more inclined to hire full time from a part time employment pool than take a person from the outside.
10. Tell me about yourself.
"I would be happy to talk about myself, what exactly are you interested in?" If the interviewer does not want specific information, touch on some personal episodes, but use the opportunity to sell your job skills.
11. We have many qualified applicants. Why do you think we should hire you for this job?
"I believe my background experience and interest in the job equip me to handle the work well." (Avoid saying "I know I can do the job" because you won't actually know unless you do the job.)
12. Have you had any serious illness or injury?
If you haven't had problems, this is easy. If you have, be prepared with a signed clearance from your doctor that states you are in good health and can meet the demands of the job.
13. What are your weaknesses? What are your strengths?
Present your weaknesses as possible strengths, "I am used to working in situations where the buck stops with me. I follow a project from start to finish." For your strengths, memorize what it is you do best, such as: "I work well as a team player."
14. Do you have any questions about the company or job?



Again, if you've done your homework, you will be comfortable relating your interest and enthusiasm about the company and the job. Questions such as, "Would you please describe the duties of the job for me?" or "What is the largest single problem facing your staff now?" are appropriate.

15. How do you feel about working with a younger (or older) or female supervisor?

"I don't believe that age (or gender) is a criterion of ability to supervise. I feel very comfortable either way."



16. How would you describe your work style?

Describe how you attack a project. Are you best in the morning? Can you operate with commotion around you? Do you work well under pressure? Remember, it takes all kinds of working styles to complement a team.

17. What did you like best about your last job? The least?

Be general about your answers, as the interviewer is hunting for attitudes to see if they'll mesh with the company: "I liked working with people and being a team player." As for what you liked least, remember people change jobs for good reasons. "I would like more responsibility," or "I am looking for more opportunity for growth" are good answers. Don't badmouth former employers and co-workers.

18. What three accomplishments are you most proud of?

You may want to clarify whether the interviewer is referring to your professional life, your personal life, or both. Your life has been full of mini-miracles whether you've noticed or not! What about the time you finished a project much sooner than anticipated? Did you walk 26 miles for the march of Dimes? Have you ever used CPR on anyone? Were you given recognition for being the most dependable employee of the month? What made you feel like a million bucks?

19. What person has had the greatest influence on you?

There is no right or wrong answer here. It could be a number of people, from your father or mother, to figures in history. It may be the guy next door! It may be someone you haven't met personally, but have read about or heard about on the news.

20. Why is your GPA so low?

A good explanation can turn this into a plus: "I've been working to pay for my college expenses 30 to 40 hours per week." Then emphasize which responsibilities of that job relate directly to the position you are seeking.

21. If you were an animal, what animal would you be?

Treat this like the fun question it is. Have a sense of humor and laugh. There is no right answer!

22. What are some of the crises you've encountered in other jobs and how did you solve them?

If you cannot relate this to a professional situation, explain how you solved a personal problem.

23. Why did you leave your last job?

This question creates fear in job applicants' hearts. Especially if they were fired. But being fired no longer is a disgrace. It's happened to thousands of people. The person interviewing you may have been recently fired, too. Here's how to answer. If you were downsized, lost your job in a merger or if the company relocated, say so. And no more. That's enough. No gory details. If you were fired for cause, you don't have to say so. Instead say it was time for you to move on. Or, that you wanted a more challenging job. Once again, you now have the right to remain silent.

Explaining Why You Change Jobs Often

"Why have you changed jobs so often?" Recruiters may know you've done so if you've listed exact dates of employment on your resume. "Listing dates for employment is a regrettable necessity unless you want to make it obvious you are trying to hide something," according to *Job Smart: What You Need to Know to Get the Job You Want*.

Present the various jobs you've had as proof of your many skills and work experience. If the interviewer still wants to know why you've had so many jobs, you may want to reply that, in the past, your goals weren't firm. Now they are.

In a nutshell:

- Show that you are aware of the company's mission.
- Show that you are interested in the work to be performed.
- Show how you can contribute or benefit the business.
- Don't compare yourself to other applicants.
- Show how your skills and/or education fit the job description

Closing the Interview

Close the interview in the same friendly, positive manner in which you started. If you want the job, say so. Summarize your qualifications again before leaving. When the interview is over, leave promptly. Do not overstay your time.

After the Interview

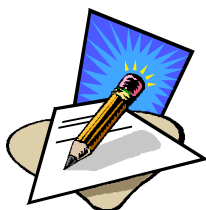
Think about the interview and learn from the experience. Evaluate the success and failures by asking yourself these questions:

- What points did I make that seemed to interest the employer?
- Did I present my qualifications well? Did I overlook qualifications that were important for the job?
- Did I learn all I needed to know about the job?
- Did I talk too much? Too little?
- Was I too assertive? Not assertive enough?
- Was I dressed appropriately?
- Did I effectively close the interview?

The more you learn from the interview, the easier the next one will become. You will become more confident. Make a list of specific ways you can improve your next interview.

Finally, write a thank-you note or letter to each person who took part in the interview. Thank the employer for their time, restate your interest and qualifications for the job, and remind them of your intent to follow-up. Mail the letter the day of the interview.

For more information: <http://www.search-women.com/careervplanning/> ,
<http://www.dbm.com/jobguide/netintv.html> ,
<http://www.studentadvantage.lycos.com/lycos/issue/1,1572,c2-i19,00.html>
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